

# THE REFORMER.

No. VI.]

PHILADELPHIA, JUNE 1, 1820.

[VOL. I.

Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth. . . . Jeremiah, v. 1.

## EDITORIAL REMARKS.

From what appeared in our last number, it will be perceived, that a public denunciation of this work has commenced, and a spirit of indignation been manifested towards it. This was not unexpected; and it may be proper here to state, that we counted the cost, and considered the consequences of rebuking evil and exhibiting truth, before we engaged in the publication; and have not put our hand to the plough with a prospect of looking back, whatever opposition we may encounter, or whoever may combine against us.

We feel no disposition to disturb the repose of the world, or to excite enmity: but the experience of all past ages shows, that evils cannot be pointed out and witnessed against, without producing this effect. The generality of professing christians are, at this time, in a very fallen state; and to expect they will receive the truth, or hear it without opposing it, would be altogether unreasonable; for such a circumstance is not to be met with in the annals of history. There is, therefore, little or no ground to suppose, that the bigotted and false hearted will derive any great benefit from any thing that may be written or exhibited; but it is proper

to guard the sincere and upright against the snares and dangers with which they are surrounded, through false teachers, and mere nominal religion. We have endeavoured not to enter upon any thing with precipitancy, or go beyond the line of duty ; and we leave our cause in the hands of God, who knoweth all hearts, appealing to Him for the purity and sincerity of our intentions. We plainly see, that integrity and uprightness are almost lost amongst men, and we feel it to be our duty to declare, that those who look up to the ministers of this day to be guided in the way of righteousness, must be perverted and ruined ; for that they have nearly all gone out of the right way, is easy to be proved, as long as the New Testament remains a standard to judge by.

We are sensible, that to some it must appear harsh and cruel to expose evils, and thereby represent in an unfavourable light, many who now stand foremost in a religious profession, and are highly esteemed amongst men—but we cannot help it. We might have been even more pointed in our testimony, if we had not wished to avoid giving offence as much as possible. But we see we cannot discharge our duty without giving offence, and as enmity and opposition manifest themselves, there will be less occasion for us to use reserve. We fear nothing from opposition, and ministers and their people are at full liberty to denounce us and our publication, and to represent it in whatever light they may think proper. We shall endeavour to be regulated by a principle of truth ; and we apprehend our opposers will find very little from Scripture, or any

other standard of righteousness, to support their side of the question; and to use mere declamation or resort to calumny and abuse, always argues a corrupt cause, and can have no weight with those who possess a sound judgment, and are actuated by principle.

It is asserted in the Vindicator, that "calling The Reformer a useful work, is one of the many incorrect assertions which the authors of the Bee have set forth." We would ask, When was it ever known to be the case, that those against whom a testimony has been delivered, considered it calculated to be useful? But in regard to its usefulness, we are free to confess, that we have no idea The Reformer will be useful to Vindicator or his party, any more than Christ's testimony was to the cause of the teachers among the Jews, or Paul's preaching was useful to the business of the Silversmiths at Ephesus; for it does not set forth the propriety of giving large salaries to ministers—of calling them Divines, and considering them as a superior order of beings.

Evils, numerous and great, have for some time borne a very distinguished sway in what is termed christendom, and it is proper that they should receive rebuke; and if our testimony has been undertaken in the counsel of God, no human arm can prevail against it, or hinder its influence. Opposition we expect. Indeed, we hesitate not here to state it as our belief, that a time of great persecution will yet be experienced in all countries now professedly christian, whenever the truth is fully declared, and the evils which now exist are rebuked with the same plainness that Christ rebuked the

evils among the scribes and pharisees. Because our government will not now admit of persecution by civil penalties, it does not follow that this will always be the case ; for it must be recollected, that a majority of two-thirds of the representatives of this country can alter our present constitution, and make laws to suppress the truth, and even put to death those who deliver it. Those prepared to support corrupt christianity, are certainly very numerous; and it is easy to perceive, let people become possessed of the same spirit manifested in *Vindicator*, that they will vote only for such men to represent them, as will use their influence to enact laws to suppress every thing that may operate against their cause, or expose their ways and practices. Great alterations often take place in a short time, and the most bitter enmity and persecution that have been ever exercised, were produced, in consequence of the truth coming forward to oppose evil. The Jews, a little before our Saviour's testimony went forth, seemed quite averse to persecution, and had no idea they should ever put to death a righteous person for declaring the truth to them ; but when Christ rebuked with plainness their ways and practices, they soon became possessed of a different disposition : and from what may be seen from all former ages, we must expect the true church or people of God will be brought out from the world, and made pure by severe persecution and sufferings.

Indeed, the author of *Vindicator* has not scrupled to represent The Reformer as dangerous in the extreme, and insinuates the propriety of suppressing it

by law as much as Paine's Age of Reason. This is pretty bold for these times ; and he would, perhaps, have gone farther on the subject, if he had not thought public opinion would be against him, and he would show the cloven foot too clearly.

---

It has been observed by some, that the editors of this work point out various evils, and hold forth a very gloomy view of the christian world ; but they do not show what is right, and what people ought to do.

In reply to this we would remark :

First. Whenever any thing is delivered that is plain and pointed, and bears upon the particular case of certain persons, they are almost sure to dislike it, and find fault with it in some respect or other ; they can feel no rest till they have done this ; and after having done it, they seem more satisfied, and the truths that have been declared, operate no longer with any force upon them. When the Jews could accuse Christ, and find fault with his testimony, all he said was lost upon them, and had no tendency to effect their amendment.

Secondly. With regard to what is right, and what people ought to do, we shall here state what they should do in a very concise manner.—They should in every case, do unto another, as they would another should do unto them, in reality and not in pretence. They should on no occasion indulge resentment, feel pride, or be exalted ; but be always humble, meek, and of a compassionate spirit. Their constant aim

should be, in every instance, to do what is right, use no deception, and always speak the truth. In short, their daily concern ought to be, to do the will of their heavenly Father. We might here enlarge, but we conceive it unnecessary. It is the intention of the heart which the Lord looks at ; and if every one was truly seeking to do what is right towards God and towards man, we should soon see a very great alteration in the world for the better—and where there is not such a disposition of mind, every thing else avails nothing.

The prophet Isaiah, in a few words, made known to the Jews what they were to do :—*Put away the evil of your doings ; cease to do evil ; learn to well.* Very little more is said in the whole book of Isaiah respecting what they should do ; and this, if attended to, was sufficient. People, therefore, need not be so very anxious as they pretend to be, about knowing what they shall do : let them search out the evils they are prone to, and put them away from among them ; for righteousness builds itself upon the ruins of iniquity.

Thirdly. The Lord told the prophet Jeremiah, that he had set him over the nations, and over the kingdoms, *to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down* ; and then he was *to build, and to plant.* Let any enlightened person reflect for a moment, and he will see, that there is much to be rooted out, and pulled down, and destroyed, and thrown down, before it will answer any great purpose to undertake to build, and to plant. *Break up the fallow ground, and sow not among thorns,* was the command which the Lord gave one of his prophets in a time of degeneracy.

For *The Reformer*.

*To the Editors.*—I have read in the fifth number of your periodical work, extracts from the “Bee,” which appears to have stung the clerical votaries to the quick, and raised no small stir among the craftsmen; and some one, it appears, has come forward in the spirit of the old pharisees, to vindicate what he calls *Divines* and *Reverends*, lest their influence should be lost, and the hope of their gain come to an end, by a faithful ministration of too much truth through the medium of your useful paper.

The ministers, indeed, in those parts, appear to be in the tried situation of Demetrius and the craftsmen in the apostle Paul’s time, when they cried out, “Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.” And methinks the language of the ecclesiastical *sentinels* at Poughkeepsie, is on this wise: “Brethren of like occupation with ourselves, ye see and hear, how that not alone at this our village, but also at Philadelphia, New York, and many other cities and places, this ‘mote in the sun beam’ of our prosperity, is ‘caressed by the smiles of approbation’ from persons of rank and standing in society, and if not checked in its career, it will lay waste our hierarchy, destroy our power over the consciences of men, and turn away much people from following with us. For some of the writers in that work, have the impious effrontery to call us Blind Shepherds, declare our ministry to be merchandise, and assert that our call to the sacred desk is money; so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought, but also our temples left vacant, and our magnificence and ministry despised, and we shall have to dig or beg for our support. Therefore, let us, as faithful *sentinels*, be on the alert, tenacious of the system which cements our flocks to us. Let us sound an alarm from the sacred desk, and then vindicate our cause by calumny and abuse; and if this will not beat down the forces of the formidable foe, let us engage the secular arm, and go forth in strong columns, and thus dignify our stations as men of power and conse-

quence on the earth. Here is our Reverend friend L. just returned from Philadelphia, and informs us the dangerous work called The Reformer, has a wide and extensive circulation there among our enemies. Brethren, it is high time to bestir ourselves, and as *good shepherds* be on the alert; and if any *would-be Reformer*, or *licentious Bee*, attempts to infringe on our religious liberties, to go on as we think proper without rebuke, or call in question the propriety of our being entitled 'Divines,' let us cause the people, when they assemble to elect our representatives, to select men like minded with us, who will enact laws to maintain the dignity of our stations, and put down whatever may rise up to annoy us, undermine the gain of our calling, or lessen us in the esteem of men."

A striking inconsistency of considerable moment, deserves here to be noticed. It is that which exists between the precepts of the gospel, and the lives of those who profess to be its ministers, and are dignified with the titles of Rev. and Divines. They either cannot, or will not see it themselves; but it is evident to all who are not blinded by prejudice or the god of this world. The life and precepts of Jesus Christ inculcate self-denial, humility, and a contempt for the honour, power and riches of this world: and yet we see those, who are considered the heralds of the gospel in this day, living in direct opposition to these requirements. They are often haughty, overbearing and fond of power; seeking the wealth of this world and the aggrandizement of their families. Like the teachers in Christ's time, they say, but do not; and they lay burdens on others which they touch not with one of their fingers. They preach patience to those who are poor, resignation to those who are afflicted, and humility to those who are not so much in danger of pride as themselves and their own household. They are, in short, too generally, examples to the contrary of all they teach to others. Did they only pocket the emoluments of their profession quietly, and say nothing about Jesus Christ and his religion, and enjoy themselves without preaching humility and self-denial to others, they

might at least avoid the sin of inconsistency. Did they not call themselves the disciples of Christ, they might pass for the disciples of Epicurus, and their pleasures and their interests would then agree with each other. But what they profess in words, they deny by practice, and insult their Maker, while they deceive the world: and if the spirit of prophecy does not fail me, they will before long bring their establishment and themselves into merited and universal contempt.

The inconsistencies into which men are led by their outward profession of christianity, arise chiefly from the purity of its precepts, and the neglect of the spirit of christianity, occasioned by a mistaken attachment to outward forms, and a substitution of the authority of man for the truth of God; following expositions, creeds, confessions of faith, standards, formularies, liturgies, homilies, &c. instead of the spirit of Christ. The generality of the professors in this day, I am bold to declare, have no true religion in their hearts; and their respect to its forms, is merely the prejudice of education, or a regard to the *loaves and fishes* of office.

ADELPHUS.

---

*For The Reformer.*

*Messrs. editors.*—Reformation is very desirable, and indeed from the appearance of things at present, it is much needed. But as long as people entertain a good opinion of themselves, and have an idea that there is a great deal of religion and righteousness in the earth, it cannot be expected they will become any better. Christ has said, *the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick*; and it is certain, that people will act according to this maxim, however sick they may be, if they imagine they are well. *Many might have become good, had they not judged themselves to be so, while they were otherwise.*

Hence it follows, that people must first see they are not right before they will seek after amendment; and while they are in a dark and bewildered state,

the most glaring evils and inconsistencies are not easily perceived by them; and it is often a very difficult task to convince them of their impropriety. Indeed, it is impossible to do this, if they have so refused to receive the truth in the love of it, that God has sent them *strong delusions to believe a lie.*

It requires no great degree of learning to prove, that the christian world is now in a very fallen and degenerate state, and that the number of those who possess true piety is very few; and yet we find the generality of professing christians, have an idea that religion is in a very prosperous condition; while some are almost ready to conclude that the millennial state of the church is about to take place. But I would candidly ask, Do we see any thing characteristic of the true kingdom of God, which consists in righteousness and peace? Is not every man's hand comparatively against his neighbour; and was there ever a time, when cheating, dishonesty, and injustice, were so general as at the present day? It is true, we now and then hear it said by one and another, that there is a great revival at such or such a place. If by this it is meant that people are becoming proselytes to some sect, I am willing to admit of its being correct; but at the same time I must remark, for people to come forward and unite themselves to some society, in this day, is no proof that the world is getting any better, or that the persons themselves have become any better; for we seldom see them more humble or more inclined to do what is right than they were before; and in some instances they appear only to be worse. Now had the tree been made good, the fruit would be good also.

It is clearly to be seen, that even those few societies that were once zealous for the truth, and bore a faithful testimony against the corruptions and evils in the christian world, are fallen into decay, and many things which they have highly approved in their founders, they now condemn in others. Where is that regard to righteousness, and that firmness in rebuking iniquity, which we discover in the first preachers among them? These pious men have, no doubt,

gone to receive the reward of their faithfulness ; but little did many of them imagine, that their labours in clearing away the rubbish, and planting the good seed of the kingdom, would be so soon lost, and briars and thorns spring up in the vineyards to choke the plants of righteousness. These honest men, (for so many of them may be truly called) began in the spirit, but their numerous followers are likely to end in the flesh. The friendship of the world, which they have been led to embrace, is enmity with God ; and it will be well for them to remember from whence they are fallen, and repent and do their first works, lest the candlestick be wholly removed out of its place.

No reformation can be expected, as long as people suffer themselves to be implicitly led by blind guides and teachers, and they are looked upon as patterns to imitate ; for I appeal to the impartial and candid observer, if there is not a greater degree of pride and outward grandeur exhibited in the lives of the generality of those called ministers in this day, than there is in their hearers, to whom they pretend to teach humility. And do they not, like the false prophets in old time, prophesy smooth things, and with feigned words make merchandise of them ; assuming to themselves at the same time, the sole right to the key of knowledge, to lock and unlock as they think proper ; and if a congregation of people are rich, and will pay them liberally, they will undertake to impart to them the knowledge of salvation ; but if they are poor, and cannot come up to their demands in pecuniary matters, they must remain ignorant. These things are but too true, and until people come to exercise their own judgments, and examine for themselves in matters of religion, we shall see no change for the better.

#### SYNOPSIS.

---

#### *For The Reformer.*

Much has been said in relation to the corrupt state of the clergy, and were it only intended with a view of

producing a reform in them, it might with great propriety be laid aside as a useless and unprofitable undertaking; because, whilst they are so conspicuously exalted amongst the various denominations as oracles, and borne about upon the shoulders of the people, whom they lead and cause to err, little may be expected to be done for their amendment; and, if ever there is a radical change brought about in the world for the better, it must be through the medium of that light, which *alone* leads to a true discovery of what is wrong; and not from any thing men influenced by the hopes of getting from 2 to \$3000 a year can do.

Jesus Christ has expressly declared himself to be the light of the world, and that they that follow him, should not walk in darkness, but should have the light of life. Now if peoples' christianity does not lead them to this source of instruction, to a daily dependence upon the wisdom, power, and all-sufficiency of God; though they may appear to be very strict professors, and do many things in honour of Christ, yet they are undoubtedly enemies to his holy cross, which would crucify and make them what they ought, and what they verily would wish to be, if they were seriously disposed to receive him in the way of his coming; for to as many as receive him, he gives power to become sons of God.

The religion of the world, or the religion of the day, costs those who profess it very little: what is taught being for the most part only some outward ceremonies and observances, which people may conform to without being governed by any principle of righteousness or love to God. The way of salvation under the gospel dispensation is not a course of ordinances and outward duties, prescribed of men, but it is the revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart, and without this inward revelation, all our reading the scriptures, praying, going to meeting, practising ordinances, &c. &c. are but vain, and in the end will prove but a false covering, and not the covering of the spirit.

A profession of religion, when viewed in its proper light, will be found to be a very serious ground for any

one to take, inasmuch as it ranks those who make a profession of it, amongst the followers and friends of Christ, and they are especially required to depart from iniquity. Says the apostle, *Let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.* But what a want of compliance with this command is to be met with among the members of the various denominations in this day. Ministers and people are pretty much alike; and only strip them of their prescribed ordinances, rites, and ceremonies, and their nakedness is immediately discovered; they are then found to be but mere men of the world, whose highest interests are centred more on things below than upon things above.

The state of religion, in this day, is indeed truly deplorable; and as long as hireling ministers have so much assurance, and the people have so much blindness and ignorance as to suffer them to impose upon them their merchandise of forms and ceremonies, so long christendom may be represented as *waters casting up mire and dirt.*

X. D.  
For The Reformer.

It is the business of true piety to undeceive mankind with respect to all their errors and mistakes; of which, among the many that are in the world, none are more universal and of more mischievous consequence, than the showy parade and empty pageantry which the *hirelings* impose upon mankind for religion; but which, so far from having a particle of genuine christianity in it, has a direct tendency to lead the mind away from it. Religion consists in feeling—it is a silent intercourse of the soul with its heavenly parent, and every intervening object has a tendency to arrest its attention, weaken its fervours, and stop it short of its true destiny.

The religion of Jesus Christ, needs not the aid of human ingenuity and contrivance to accomplish its end; for he has promised to all his true disciples, his

immediate aid and protection. He has placed himself at the door of every heart, not merely a passive guest, but he knocketh actively for entrance ; and whoever is willing to open the door and let him in, he will sup with them and they with him.

W.

---

*Progress of degeneracy in the primitive Church.*

[Extracted from the *Encyclopædia*.]

“ During a great part of the second century, the churches were independent of each other ; nor were they joined together by association, confederacy, or any other bonds but those of charity. Each assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws ; which were either enacted, or at least approved of, by the society. But, in process of time, all the christian churches of a province were formed into one large ecclesiastical body ; which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times, in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole. This institution had its origin among the Greeks ; but in a short time it became universal ; and similar assemblies were formed in all places where the gospel had been planted. These assemblies, which consisted of the deputies from several churches, were called *Synods* by the Greeks, and *Councils* by the Latins ; and the laws enacted in these general meetings were called *canons*, i. e. rules. These councils, of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of the second century, changed the whole face of the church, and gave it a new form ; for by them the ancient privileges of the people were considerably diminished, and the power and authority of the bishops greatly augmented. The humility indeed, and the prudence of these pious prelates, hindered them from assuming, all at once, the power with which they were afterwards invested. At their first appearance in these general councils, they acknowledged that they were no more than the delegates of their respective churches ;

and that they acted in the name, and by the appointment of their people. But they soon changed this humble tone; imperceptibly extended the limits of their authority; turned their influence into dominion, their counsels into laws; and at length openly asserted, that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people *authoritative rules, of faith and manners.*"

Whenever the simplicity of the gospel is departed from, by any people, and the inventions of men are substituted in the place of it, its glory is lost: and though they may keep up a splendid outward appearance, establish what is termed orthodoxy and uniformity, and have every thing regulated by rule, they are in a fallen condition, and the cause of righteousness and true religion will no longer prosper among them. And yet this track, every society of christians has pursued, to a greater or less extent, that has arisen within our knowledge.\*

---

"The corruptions which had been introduced in the first century, and which were almost coeval with christianity itself, continued to gain ground in the second. Ceremonies, in themselves futile and useless, but which must be considered as highly pernicious when joined to a religion incapable of any other ornament than the upright and virtuous conduct of its professors, were multiplied for no other purpose than to please the ignorant multitude. The immediate consequence of this was, that the attention of christians was drawn aside from the important duties of morality; and they were led to imagine, that a careful observance of the ceremonies, might make amends for the neglect of moral duties. This was the most pernicious opinion that could possibly be entertained."

---

"It somehow or other happens, that almost every body is more inclined to observe the ceremonial part

\*It has been stated, that the first meetinghouse publicly built by the christians, was that of St. Saviour at Rome, founded by Constantine, in the fourth century.

of devotion than the moral ; and hence, according to the different humors or constitution of different persons, there have been numberless forms of christianity, and the most virulent contentions among those who professed themselves followers of the Prince of Peace. It is obvious, that if the moral conduct of christians was to be made the standard of faith, instead of speculative opinions, all these divisions must cease in a moment ; but while christianity or any part of it, is made to consist in speculation, or the observance of ceremonies, it is impossible there can be any end of sects or heresies. No opinion whatever is so absurd, but some people have pretended to argue in its defence ; and no ceremony so insignificant, but it hath been explained and sanctified by hot-headed enthusiasts : and hence ceremonies, sects, and absurdities, have been multiplied without number, to the prejudice of society and the christian religion."

---

#### THE LIGHT OF TRUTH.

"We read of the letter, and we read also of the spirit of the New Testament. It would require a volume, rather than a single paragraph of a single sermon, to draw the line between the one and the other. But you will readily acknowledge that there are many things of this book which a man, though untaught by the Spirit of God, may be made to know. One of the simplest instances is, he may learn the number of chapters in every book, and the number of verses in every chapter. But is this all? No ; for by the natural exercise of his memory, he may be able to master all its historical information. And is this all? No ; for by the natural exercise of his judgment he may compare Scripture with Scripture,—he may learn what its doctrines are,—he may demonstrate the orthodoxy of every one article in our national Confession,—he may rank among the ablest and most judicious of the commentators,—he may read, and with understanding too, many a ponderous volume, he may store himself with the learning of

many generations—he may be familiar with all the systems, and have mingled with all the controversies ; and yet, with a mind supporting, as it does, the burden of the erudition of whole libraries, he may have gotten to himself no other wisdom than the wisdom of the letter of the New Testament. The man's creed, with all its arranged and its well weighed articles, may be no better than the dry bones in the vision of Ezekiel, put together into a skeleton, and fastened with sinews, and covered with flesh and skin, and exhibiting to the eye of the spectator the aspect and the lineaments of a man, but without breath, and remaining so till the Spirit of God breathed into it, and it lived. And it is in truth a sight of wonder, to behold a man who has carried his knowledge of Scripture as far as the wisdom of man can carry it,—to see him blest with all the light which nature can give, but labouring under all the darkness which no power of nature can dispel,—to see this man of many accomplishments, who can bring his every power of demonstration to bear upon the Bible, carrying in his bosom a heart uncheered by any one of its consolations, unmoved by the influence of any one of its truths, unshaken out of any one attachment to the world, and an utter stranger to those high resolves, and the power of those great and animating prospects, which shed a glory over the daily walk of a believer, and give to every one of his doings the high character of a candidate for eternity.—”

[Chalmer's Sermons]

---

*For The Reformer.*

*Messrs. Editors.*—It is a fact, which has been demonstrated in the history of the church in past times, as well as by the occurrences which every day's experience furnishes, that such is the frailty of man, and so liable is he to be led astray by motives of self-interest, that it is extremely dangerous and impolitic for any people to place their destinies in the hands of their ministers, be they ever so good or wise, without reserving a legitimate right of control, to be used in case of undue encroachments. For when innovations take place, and there is no balance of power in the members by which redress may be obtained, we have no reason to expect, that the men who once tram-

ple on the rights of the people, will have virtue sufficient left, voluntarily to surrender back the violated trust.

Of this we have lately a striking instance, which I fear will form an era in the history of Methodism, that will be productive of evils, which might have been foreseen and avoided, provided that wisdom which is from above had now, as in former years, directed our councils.

The circumstance to which I allude, relates to an application lately made by the society in Philadelphia, to the General Conference, to allow members the privilege of a lay-representation.\* This however has met with the fate which some had predicted, notwithstanding our sanguine hopes to the contrary. My hopes were grounded on two considerations, viz. the piety of our ministers, and the lesson which should have been learned from the bad effects which arose from the stubborn and unyielding conduct of the ministers in England and Ireland, in not attending to the just claims of their people, until necessity drove them to the painful alternative of separating.

As to our hopes now of obtaining a redress of our grievances, they are very feeble and uncertain. Our fears are excited by a circumstance which has lately come to our knowledge. One of our travelling preachers, in an address, had recommended the propriety of appointing a committee at each Conference, whose duty it should be to assist the bishops in stationing the preachers—a service the most responsible and perplexing of any to

\* Thomas Coake and Francis Asbury, say, in our book of Discipline (1792) "We think ourselves obliged frequently, to view and review the whole order of our church; always aiming at perfection; standing on the shoulders of those who lived before us, and taking the advantage of our former selves."—If by perfection they here meant, perfection in church government, (and that they did is very evident) there has been, as yet, but a small progress among us in this science.

The plan of an itinerant Ministry amongst us, as it approaches nearest to the apostolical method of any other, we highly approve; while, at the same time we must remark, that this very circumstance peculiarly disqualifies the Preachers, rightly to manage the various concerns with which they are now almost wholly entrusted in our congregations. They remain but a short time in any one station, and their acquaintance with the affairs of the societies must necessarily be imperfect. Hence, there can be no correct, or well established polity amongst us, while it is vested wholly in the Preachers; their limited acquaintance with many circumstances in the congregations over which they preside, renders it impossible that it should be otherwise; and, therefore, it is not uncommon for one Minister to establish regulations, and exercise acts of discipline, which, on the arrival of a successor in office, are immediately done away, or reversed, to give place to others, which different views or different feelings may dictate. All these evils might be obviated, by placing the government of the Society and its concerns more in the hands of the people, where it most certainly ought to be, and where it really is, I believe, in almost every other Christian persuasion.

which they are called. But, strange to tell, our bishops taking up the pen (or authorizing some person to do it for them) defended their present power and prerogatives, and handed the publication out to the members of Conference, as an answer to the address, which had been presented for their consideration. Such is the inconsistency into which men are betrayed when raised to high stations, and invested with undue power over others. It may be these men at first entered on the duties of their appointment, with humble views, and *with fear and trembling*; conscious of the great responsibility and care which devolved on them in such a station; yet on coming to possess power and honour, such it appears have been the effects\* produced on their minds by their influence, that they could not consent to relinquish the agreeable privilege of appointing, by themselves, eight hundred preachers, the field of their labours; hazarding thereby all the murmurings and complaints usual on such occasions, arising out of the unavoidable blunders consequent on the present defective plan.

We may naturally infer from this circumstance, that if the bishops, with the presiding elders, who as so many parts of a

\* I am here reminded of the case of a Cardinal, in the Church of Rome, who on being nominated as a candidate to fill St. Peter's Chair, affected much humility and concern, lest he should not be able to support such an intolerable load as that of the churches. All this tended but to raise him in the esteem of his friends, who took those appearances for an infallible mark of his meekness and exalted piety. Accordingly, his election was secured. After some time had passed, he began to manifest something of an opposite character, when one of his friends took the liberty to put him in mind of his former exercises; to whom he replied, with an air of triumph:—"I feel so wonderfully strengthened now, that I can, not only bear the weight of the Catholic Church, but of all the world beside."

When J. Wesley gave his consent to ordain ministers, to act as Superintendants over the Societies in the U. States, he was induced to believe, from representations made to him, that it was the only plan which could be devised to preserve the body together; and he submitted to the measure as a matter of necessity. But little did that good man imagine, that Thomas Coake and Francis Asbury would suffer themselves to pass by the pompous titles of Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and have their names inserted as such, on the Minutes of their Conferences, and in the Book of Discipline; for although the term Bishop means no more than elder, presbyter, or overseer; yet, in consequence of the abuses which had been practised in Protestant, as well as Popish christendom, under that sacred title, he meant ever studiously to avoid its adoption; well aware that every thing resembling pomp or parade, was irreconcileable with the character of a minister of the Lord Jesus. His purpose, indeed, was, by cherishing primitive simplicity, both in manners and maxims, *to raise up a holy people*; and he very well knew that in order to effect this, much would depend on the deep piety, and humble life of those who were to be the instruments in promoting it.

Dr. Campbell, in his Dissertation on the New Testament, says, "It is commonly in the decline of *merit* that pompous titles are most affected. At first, no doubt, vain glory has led many to assume them, to whom they did not belong by right of office; and an interested adulation has induced others to give them."

grand machine, always move together, can maintain their sway over their brethren in the ministry, it is not likely they will listen to the appeals of their people, praying to be admitted to a participation with them in the government of the church.

When we discover in the ministers of the gospel who should be humble and of mortified habits of life, an inordinate thirst for power and rule, a fondness for high sounding titles, as Bishops, Elders, Rev. &c. a disposition to urge forward the building of splendid houses of worship, affixing to them the names of Wesley, Asbury, or some other dead or living saint, and see them insisting on having the deeds of these houses made over to them, giving no countenance to charters, which vest the right in the people, it is high time that something should be done; lest things assume a more threatening aspect; for when men become so excessively fond of power, it is a sure and infallible mark, that it is no longer safe to entrust them with it.

Now if things of this kind are allowed to pass by unnoticed, from a fear of disturbing the repose of the Society, will it not be the case when they shall have reached a point which places them beyond the possibility of remedy, that this fatal security, this false and cruel delicacy, will be the object of as bitter reproach and censure, as the writer of these remarks may now have heaped upon him, for his freedom and candour used on this occasion. But be this as it may, we shall proceed to point out the evils to which the present policy if persisted in will infallibly lead.

We, as a people, have succeeded to a remarkable degree in making proselytes to our faith. We have of course become a numerous body. We form in many places a very weighty and respectable part of the religious community. But have we not been betrayed into a desire to count more on numbers than on living members, and becoming popular, have we not begun to vie with other denominations in the size and splendour of our places of worship. Witness those lately built in Boston, New York, &c. &c. the extravagance in some of which (notwithstanding the pressure of the times) would amply serve the purpose of J. Wesley and his humble followers to erect a chapel good enough for them to worship their God in. Have we not indeed forgotten the directions given by our first founder on this subject, viz. "Let all our places of worship be built plain and decent, but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable, otherwise the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us, but if so, we must be dependant on them, yea and governed by them, and then farewell to methodist discipline, if not doctrine too."

That this has now become the case with us, few in our society will undertake to deny. In consequence of a departure from our former simplicity, and original Methodism, in erecting cost-

ly and numerous meetinghouses, with other expenditures, particularly in large cities, we are groaning under a load of debt, from which, at present, we see no prospect of being relieved; and hence, wealthy members have become a very desirable and almost a necessary acquisition. And by reason of the expenses incurred and an increase of the salaries of our preachers (for they have it in their power to fix upon whatever salary they think proper, we having no control in the matter) our religious meetings, especially those of the leaders, have lost their former sanctity, by the reiterated appeals which have to be made for money; for although we have generally contributed to the best of our ability, it proves to be quite insufficient for our purposes. To remedy the defect, a disposition may ere long discover itself, (indeed it has already been hinted) to adopt the plan in use among other denominations; viz. of making Pews in our houses of worship, and renting them out to those who will be willing to give a high price to occupy some distinguished situation, that they may manifest their rank in life, and be separated from the poorer members of society. Such a measure would, no doubt, be gratifying to some; but the greater part of our members most earnestly pray a deliverance from it.

But how shall the evils we labour under be avoided, together with the unhappy consequences which result from them. On this part of the subject we enter with the greatest freedom, from a belief that it is our duty: and we hope, for the honour, peace and prosperity of the connexion, that our suggestions, may not be altogether unheeded. And,

*First.* Let us lay aside all our high and towering notions of greatness and grandeur; retrench our present unnecessary expenses, which tend so much to embarrass our temporal concerns, and discourage our people; and cease any longer to vie with other denominations in being a respectable body in the esteem of this world. Let us build no more places of worship, until necessity calls for them; and then let us invariably follow the directions given by our worthy founder, which have already been quoted; never presuming to take one step, in measures of this nature, till authorised by the voice of the people. And, when their consent is obtained, let there be no departure from the plan of building, or in making improvements, which they have deemed most proper, to please the taste or gratify the fancy of rich men destitute, perhaps, of the spirit of the Gospel.\* This procedure, as it applies to the trustees of congregations,

\* These observations, by some, may be considered as applying to matters of no great consequence; but let it be remembered, that the tumult, in England and Ireland, arose first out of money concerns pressing heavily on the members, by reason of the Preachers and Trustees entering upon enterprises, not authorised by the voice of the people, and refusing to present their accounts, in detail of their

and ministers, ought to be well considered; as much trouble and contention have arisen from this quarter, to the destruction of order and unity amongst believers.

*Secondly.* Let our ministers seriously reflect on the department, which, in the order of God, they are called to fill in the religious world; and for which they were formerly so well qualified—laying aside all that lordly dignity of deportment, which has justly subjected some to the imputation of pride, and incurred the reproach and censure that they were above condescending to any intimacy with the poorer class of their society. Let them not lose sight of the stated and invariable rule by which God carries on his work now, as in the days of the Apostles:—*by using the weak things of the world, and things which are despised*, as instruments to accomplish his purposes, and promote the salvation of men, *that no flesh should glory in his presence*. And let them call to mind the words of the apostle James: “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”

The primitive Methodist ministers laid no claim to temporal power, nor sought the honours of this vain world. And while they nobly disdained these unworthy pursuits, they were abundantly blessed in their own souls, and favoured by peculiar marks of divine approbation in their administrations, to the reformation of thousands. Their pious and uniform lives were their only titles to the veneration of the people. Their authority was founded on, and only exercised agreeably to the *Magna Charta* of the Scriptures. Their temporal support, though their congregations were poor, was as sure as the word that promised it; for they wanted but little, and that little was always cheerfully supplied them. In a few words, their burdens, cares and fears were all cast on the Lord; and the people, seeing them truly disinterested, seeking only their good, loved and received them as the Angels of God.

How different is the state of things now amongst us! how altered are our present ministers! Worldly mindedness, pride, and selfishness, have usurped the place of better affections;\* and though we are a numerous people, and still increasing, boasting should be excluded; for it is but too evident, that the

disbursements for their satisfaction. Subsequently more general principles were embraced, and the people finding no redress, it terminated in a separation. This ought to serve as a beacon for us, to avoid those rocks on which others have been dashed to pieces.

\* This representation will apply with great propriety to other persuasions, as well as the one to which there is here an allusion; and we hope they may profit by some of the suggestions contained in this communication. EDITORS.

great body of our members are in a deep spiritual decay; and the prospects before us, in regard to a change for the better, are very gloomy.

Weigh well these truths, and ponder them in your hearts, O ye preachers, who have promoted, rather than prevented many of the numerous evils under which we now labour. Return to, and walk in the good old way. Sacrifice the Idols which have crept into your councils, unawares, with as much subtlety, and, I fear, with as much success, as did the Serpent into the purer Eden of our first parents. Show your people one striking example of your disinterestedness, and regard to the true welfare of our church, by allowing them a share in your councils and the transactions of the society to which they belong; many of whom, have as wise heads, and as pure hearts as yourselves; and by their acquaintance with the common concerns of life, business, &c. as well as the state of affairs in their local situations, are much better qualified to manage our economy, and decide with correctness in many matters of importance, than you can possibly be.

Suffer the word of exhortation. Ask not by whom it is given; but, if founded in truth, embrace it. And should the love of your Saviour sweetly constrain you to make these sacrifices, you will I trust, be abundantly rewarded in your own souls, and the advantages resulting therefrom, to the church of God, will be incalculable.

A METHODIST.

*Philadelphia May 29, 1820.*

---

An act was passed by the legislature of New York at the close of the late session, exempting all persons having religious scruples against bearing arms, from the performance of military duty in time of peace, without requiring from such persons the payment of any fine or commutation whatever in lieu of such service.

---

General Kosciusko, by his will, placed in the hands of Mr. Jefferson, a sum exceeding 20,000 dollars, to be laid out in the purchase of young female slaves who were to be educated and emancipated. The laws of Virginia have prevented the will of Kosciusko being carried into effect.— *Aurora.*

---

A certain person in this city, was one day extolling his minister, and representing him as a very good man; when he brought forward, as a mark of his humility, that he had carried his child in his arms to the steam boat, as he and his family were about to go from the city to the country for a short time. Instances of humility, it would appear, must be very rare among this class of people, when such a circumstance is noticed.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

We would here state, that we have our views in regard to the lesser matters of religion, and they do not differ from some of our correspondents, but we judge it most proper not to admit them in very express terms into this work, as other matters more important claim attention, and their insertion might introduce a controversy that would not be likely soon to terminate, and which might be unprofitable. This, we hope, will be accepted as an apology for not inserting some pieces, or the whole of some pieces forwarded to us.

We wish not to engage in controversy ourselves, nor encourage it in others, except on matters of importance, admitting of such proof, that it can soon be decided to a candid mind in favour of the correct sentiment, and which, when adopted, will be attended with certain benefit to mankind and the cause of christianity. Many of the particular differences, among the various denominations, have been already handled and discussed very fully by their respective members ; and those disposed to examine each of their claims for belief, can easily refer to them. Arguments wholly new, and very forcible, would merit more attention ; although from the great difficulty to have them conclusive on these subjects, to people in general, they would hardly be suitable for the work in which we have engaged. Principles which appear directly to affect the salvation of men ; such as a spirit of war, serving God from selfish motives, &c. &c. we shall not refuse to come forth against, if occasion calls for it ; while, at the same time, we must observe, that these things are, in our view, so evidently wrong, that to attempt to disprove them, or show their incorrectness, would be much the same as to undertake to show that darkness is not light, or that sin is contrary to holiness.

Glaring and prominent evils, generally countenanced, and big with pernicious consequences, first demand attention : as people must be brought to leave off stealing, before it is worth while to endeavour to make them pay tithe of *mint, anise, and cummin* ; or to attend to the smaller matters of religion.

We should endeavour to ascertain what has made, and what still keeps the world wicked ; and then act against it in our testimony as directly as possible. And we must not expect to kill the *Goliath*, when our aim is only directed at one of his fingers.

Z. Shall be attended to in our next number. A particular request to insert a communication which came late, rendered the postponement necessary.

---

Printed for the editors by *G. L. Austin*, back of 39, Cherry street, agent for The Reformer—to whom those wishing to become subscribers, can signify it either by letter or private conveyance.

Price of The Reformer *one dollar* a year, half payable in advance, the remainder at the end of six months. Subscribers can be supplied with numbers from the beginning of the year.